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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [MEDIA](#) [REACTION](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; VENEZUELA AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION; TIES
BETWEEN ARGENTINA AND BRAZIL; US-ARGENTINE MILITARY EXERCISES;
CRISTINA KIRCHNER'S TRIP TO WASHINGTON; 04/30/07; BUENOS AIRES

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Weekend international stories cover the closure of RCTV in Venezuela; reinvigorated ties between Argentina and Brazil; the upcoming US-Argentine naval exercises; and Argentine First Lady Cristina Kirchner's trip to Washington.

2. OPINION PIECES AND EDITORIALS

- "Chavez and freedom of expression"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" (04/30) editorializes "The Chavez administration's suppression of Venezuela's freedom of expression and information... has been demonstrated by increasingly serious actions, threats and incidents...

".. Chavez, who controls all branches of government, has personally decided to close Radio Caracas Television... based on the fact that the private channel has promoted coups d'etat and political destabilization during recent years...

"Regarding freedom of expression in the region, Gonzalo Marroquin, head of the IAPA Press Freedom Committee, said that 'Venezuela has become the country that has suffered most attacks from the government against the media and journalists... While Chavez claims that there is freedom of information and expression in his country..., this is not true given the high degree of intolerance and self-censorship due to fear of retaliation.'

"... In a democratic society, the existence of sound private media, which are independent from political and economic power, is vital. The case of RCTV should not be construed as an isolated event, but rather part of the framework of a Venezuela that urgently needs to strengthen genuine democratic pluralism, for which freedom of expression is an indispensable condition."

- "Argentina, Brazil and the region"

Ricardo Kirschbaum, general editor of leading "Clarín," writes (04/29) "Frequent recent contacts between the presidents of Argentina and Brazil is an expression of the good state of bilateral ties...

"... Venezuela has inserted itself to this understanding between Lula and Kirchner. Both Kirchner and Lula have good ties with Chavez.

"On the energy issue, Kirchner and Lula make up a tandem that is determined to undertake common initiatives, while Chavez, who has a broad and generous relationship with Fidel Castro, agrees with some

of those ideas and disagrees with others.

"Argentina and Brazil have strengthened their partnership and make up a powerful reference point in the region and beyond, including Calderon's Mexico, which they seek to incorporate.."

- "Military exercises with the US are resumed"

Daniel Gallo, political columnist of daily-of-record "La Nacion," writes (04/29) "After almost six years, military exercises with the US will resume in Argentina. While ties between the military of both countries were maintained through military exercises abroad, US-Argentine combined exercises were not conducted due to the US request for troop immunities, which was not granted by Argentina.

"After negotiations held during recent months, Washington agreed to perform an operation without asking for full immunities, and this is why the UNITAS naval exercise will be carried out next week.

"The last time Argentina carried out a military exercise with the US was in September 2001, just as the September 11 attacks were happening...

"The world has since changed. And in 2003, when the Eagle III air exercise was to be performed, the US asked for immunities, a demand that was made to all of the countries involved. Argentina refused to grant them on the basis that Washington did not recognize the International Criminal Court.

"In spite of this refusal, US troops, airplanes and ships entered the country for the 2005 Mar del Plata Summit of the Americas to protect every movement of President George W. Bush.

"This antecedent and the good ties between the military of the two countries were considered when planning a military exercise without the full immunity requested by Washington."

- "A short visit to Washington"

Ana Baron, Washington-based correspondent for leading "Clarín," writes (04/29) "Cristina Kirchner's strategy with the Jewish community is very much like that of Carlos Menem with American Cubans in Miami. According to Marc Jones, an expert in Argentina who frequently gives advice to the USG on Argentina, 'the Jewish community, like the Cuban, is a good channel to open doors to Washington and can serve Cristina well if the Democrats win the presidential elections.' 'In my opinion, this is what explains Cristina's trip to Washington, but there could be some surprises.'

"In fact, Cristina's trip to the US will be very different from the ones she recently made to France, Ecuador, Venezuela and Mexico, where she met with presidents and government officials..

"In Washington, she will only attend a single event - the Gala Dinner at the American Jewish Committee's Annual Assembly.

"... It is not a secret for anyone in Washington that following Chavez's anti-Bush rally in Argentina while Bush was in Uruguay, ties between the USG and the Argentine Government were totally frozen. According to a US source, while there have been diplomatic efforts from both embassies to ease the tension, 'the US Department of State's top brass, and particularly the White House, does not want to hear about Argentina.'

"... Then, what is the purpose of Cristina's trip to Washington? If the purpose is to use the Jewish community in order to keep doors open with Washington, the strategy could meet up with some problems.

"The Jewish community is very grateful for the request by Argentina's judiciary for international warrants for the capture of former Iranian government officials, but there is also much distrust over ties between Kirchner and Chavez. The American Jewish Committee is one of Washington's most ferocious anti-Chavez lobbies.

"Cristina's strategy does not take into account that US annoyance

with Chavez is bipartisan."

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